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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

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R 301105Z AUG 74
FM AMCONSUL KARACHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8333
INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMCONSUL LAHORE
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMCONSUL PESHAWAR
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KARACHI 1789

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, PK
SUBJECT: BALUCHISTAN SITUATION

SUMMARY: IN RECENT THREE-DAY VISIT TO QUETTA, BALUCHISTAN SITUATION APPEARED MORE TENSE AND DISQUIETING THAN 6 MONTHS EARLIER. BECAUSE OF INCREASINGLY FREQUENT INCIDENTS OF FIRINGS AND BOMBINGS, THE TOWN HAD VERY MUCH OF AN "ARMED CAMP" ATMOSPHERE. PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT SEEMED PARALYZED DUE TO WEAKNESS, INCOMPETENCE AND VENALITY. QUETTA RESOUNDED WITH VARYING VERSIONS AS TO WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR BLASTS AND BANDITRY AND WITH SPECULATION ABOUT POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS WHICH MAY BE TRIED BY BHUTTO. WHILE THERE ARE PRESENT MANY ELEMENTS OF A SITUATION GOING GRADUALLY OUT OF CONTROL, PUBLIC MOOD IS GENERALLY ONE OF CYNICISM AND DESPAIR RATHER THAN HYSTERIA AND THERE IS AS YET NO CONVINCING EVIDENCE OF AN ORGANIZED SUBVERSIVE EFFORT WITH FOREIGN SUPPORT LEADING TOWARD A FULL-SCALE INSURGENCY. END
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SUMMARY.

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1. ON AUGUST 25-28 I MADE FIRST VISIT TO QUETTA IN SIX MONTHS, ACCOMPANIED BY NEW CONGEN POL OFF MCKEE. WE RECEIVED EVEN WARMER WELCOME THAN USUAL, INCLUDING INVITATION TO STAY AT CIRCUIT HOUSE AS GOVERNOR'S GUESTS. IN ADDITION TO GOVERNOR (KHAN OF KALAT) WE SAW THREE OF SIX PROVINCIAL MINISTERS, KEY PROVINCIAL SECRETARIES, TWO OPPOSITION MPA'S, AND SEVERAL IMPORTANT BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL FIGURES. GIST OF OUR FINDINGS SET FORTH BELOW, WITH DETAILS TO FOLLOW IN MEMCONS.

2. CURRENT SITUATION: IN REACTION TO SERIES OF VIOLENT INCIDENTS INCLUDING AUGUST 2 APPARENT ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON PRIME MINISTER, (ISLAMABAD 7634), EXPLOSION AND FIRING OF TANK CARS IN RAILWAY YARD 24 AUGUST, AND BOMB EXPLOSION IN RAILWAY STATION AUGUST 27, QUETTA HAD MORE "ARMED CAMP" APPEARANCE THAN I HAD EVER SEEN DURING PAST TWO YEARS. NOT ONLY WERE POLICE STRIKE FORCE AND MILITARY PERSONNEL STATIONED AT STRATEGIC POINTS ALONG MAIN HIGHWAY, BUT ALSO INFORMAL 11 P.M. CURFEW BEING ENFORCED THROUGHOUT TOWN.

3. CONFIDENCE AMONG ARTICULATE ELEMENTS OF POPULATION APPEARED AT VERY LOW EBB, MAINLY BECAUSE OF IMPRESSION THAT GOVERNMENT TOO DIVIDED, WEAK, AND CORRUPT TO APPREHEND AND PUNISH GUILTY PARTIES, AOD INCAPABLE OF RUNNING EFFICIENT ADMINISTRATION OR KEEPING PROVINCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FREE OF GROSSEST FORMS OF CORRUPT-ION. PROVINCIAL SECRETARIAT, ALTHOUGH STILL MANNED BY A NUMBER OF CAPABLE OFFICERS, SOME OF WHOM ARE HOLDOVERS FROM NAP REGIME IN 1972, APPEARED MORE DEMORALIZED THAN ON ANY OF MY PREVIOUS VISITS. SOME SOURCES EXPRESSED A SENSE OF POWERLESSNESS -- THAT THOSE WHO WILL DETERMINE FATE OF BALUCHISTAN ARE NOT IN QUETTA, BUT IN HILLS, IN ISLAMABAD (BHUTTO), IN PUNJAB (THE JAILED NAP LEADERS), OR FURTHER AFIELD -- IN TEHRAN OR KABUL. WE NOTED VIEW THAT KEY MAN IN QUETTA IS CHIEF SECRETARY (AND BHUTTO CONFIDANT) MUNIR HUSSAIN, WHO RECEIVES PRIMIN'S ORDERS BY PHONE AND CONVEYS THEM TO GOVERNOR AND CHIEF MINISTER, WHO HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO ACQUIESCE.

4. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISORDERS? WE GOT LOTS OF ANSWERS TO THIS QUESTION, BUT NONE WE COULD ACCEPT AS ALTOGETHER AUTHORITATIVE. THE OFFICIAL LINE IS THAT THE FIRINGS AND BOMBINGS CONFIDENTIAL

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ARE BEING DONE BY THE OPPOSITION NAP, ALMOST CERTAINLY WITH AFGHAN AND POSSIBLY WITH SOVIET FINANCING. THE NAP (AND AFGHAN) LINE IS THAT THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT IS STAGING THESE INCIDENTS TO PROVIDE AN EXCUSE TO ARREST LARGE NUMBERS OF NAP WORKERS, AS HAS BEEN DONE IN NWFP. SOME FAIRLY WELL-BASED OBSERVERF POINT THE FINGER AT FORMER GOVERNOR AKBAR KHAN BUGTI (WHOM NO ONE APPEARS TO TRUST), SAYING HE IS PLOTTING TO MAKE A POLITICAL COMEBACK BY CREATING CHAOS AND THEN -- AS HE DID IN FEBRUARY 1973 --

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CONVINCING THE PRIME MINISTER THAT HE IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN SET THINGS RIGHT.

5. THE CONTENTION WHICH INTERESTED US MOST CONCERNED THE ROLE OF STUDENTS. A NUMBER OF OBSERVERS MADE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN TRIBAL RESISTANCE IN TWO MAIN HILL AREAS (MARRI AND MENGAL) AND INCIDENTS IN OTHER RURAL AREAS AND IN QUETTA TOWN, ASCRIBING THE LATTER TO ALLEGEDLY GROWING DISSIDENCE OF EDUCATED YOUTH. THESE STUDENTS WERE DESCRIBED AS BASICALLY PRO-NAP, BUT INDEPENDENT OF TRIBAL SARDARS WHO LEAD THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION AND INCITE THE VIOLENCE IN THE HILLS. WE WERE PERSUADED THAT BALUCH AND PATHAN STUDENTS CONSTITUTE THE ONE AUTHENTIC NEW AND INCALCULABLE FACTOR IN BALUCHISTAN CALCULUS. WE WERE TOLD THAT THEY ARE BEING SOUGHT OUT (AND PAID OFF BY) VARIOUS POLITICIANS, WHO REALIZE THEIR PRESENT POTENTIAL AS ARTICULATE DEMONSTRATORS (AND EVEN AS SABOTEURS) AND THEIR FUTURE IMPORTANCE AS "EDUCATED" ELITE IN LARGELY ILLITERATE SOCIETY. ALL OF THIS SOUNDED QUITE PLAUSIBLE TO US, BUT WE WERE IN NO POSITION TO CONFIRM IT IN THIS BRIEF STAY IN QUETTA.

6. WHAT IS THE SOLUTION? THERE IS A VERITABLE BABBLE OF PREDICT-IONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS. AT LEAST EVERYBODY AGREES ON AT LEAST ONE THING: THE "CONCILIATION COMMITTEE" BEING TOUTED RECENTLY BY GOVERNOR (KARACHI 1717 NOTAL) IS COMPLETELY MEANINGLESS AS IT INVOLVES MINOR SARDARS WHO HAVE NOT BEEN ACTORS IN THE RECENT POLITICAL DUELING (EVEN THE GOVERNOR FORGOT TO MENTION THIS COMMITTEE UNTIL WE ASKED ABOUT IT AT THE VERY END OF OUR 90-MINUTE MEETING). THERE IS WIDESPREAD FEELING THAT THERE CAN BE NO POLITICAL SETTLEMENT UNTIL BHUTTO RELEASES THE THREE DETAINED NAP LEADERS. SOME FAVOR RESHUFFLE OF CABINET, ESPECIALLY REPLACEMENT OF CHIEF MINISTER JAM QADIR, BUT NO ONE CAN POINT TO ANY STRONG ALTERNATIVE FIGURE IN CABINET EXCEPT PARACHA WHO COULD NOT CONCEIVABLY GET TOP POST BECAUSE HE IS A PUNJABI "SETTLER", NOT
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A BALUCHISTAN NATIVE. GOVERNOR IS ON RECORD AS FAVORING NEW ELECTIONS, WHICH MIGHT AT LEAST HAVE ADVANTAGE OF BREAKING PRESENT POLITICAL DEADLOCK (MANY CONCEDE PPP COULD GET MAJORITY) AND BRINGING IN SOME NEW MINISTERIAL BLOOD.

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---------- 109821
R 301105Z AUG 74
FM AMCONSUL KARACHI
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KARACHI 1789

7. OBSERVERS WERE ALSO CONTEMPLATING POSSIBILITY OF SOME KIND OF "CRACK-DOWN". REGARDING THE MILITARY ACTION IN THE HILLS THREATENED BY BHUTTO AFTER OCTOBER 15, THIS IS NOT RPT NOT DISMISSED ENTIRELY (NAP ESPECIALLY SEEMS TO FEAR IT). BUT MOST DO NOT CONSIDER THIS A REALLY VIABLE ALTER-NATIVE TO BHUTTO'S PRESENT NOT VERY SUCCESSFUL STRATEGY, APTLY DESCRIBED AS "PLAYING LESSER SARDARS OFF AGAINST BIG SARDARS". THE FEELING IS THAT MILITARY ACTION WOULD NOT BE EFFECTIVE DUE TO THE SPREAD OF INCIDENTS FROM THE TWO MAJOR DISTURBED HILL AREAS TO WIDELY SCATTERED RURAL AREA AND QUETTA TOWN; IN FACT MANY FEEL SUCH ACTION WOULD ONLY FURTHER POLARIZE SITUATION WITHOUT PRODUCING ANY REAL PACIFICATION. INCIDENTALLY, THE SAME PLANE WHICH BROUGHT US BACK FROM QUETTA BROUGHT FROM ISLAMABAD GOP HOME MINISTER QAYYUM KHAN AND DEFENSE SECRETARY FAZEL MUQUEEM KHAN FOR HIGH LEVEL TALKS IN QUETTA, THEREBY FUELING SPECU-LATION THAT "STRONG ARM" SOLUTION WAS BEING HAMMERED OUT
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ENTAILING MORE DETENTION OF OPPOSITIONISTS, AS IN NWFP.

8. UPSHOT OF ALL THIS IS, AS HAS BEEN CASE IN BALUCHIS-TAN FOR MORE THAN PAST YEAR, THAT EVERYONE IS UNEASY (SOME ARE EVEN RATHER DESPAIRING) BUT IT WOULD BE GOING TOO FAR

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TO SAY THAT VERY MANY PEOPLE ARE DESPERATE OR HYSTERICAL.

9. OUTLOOK: NOTHING THAT HAS HAPPENED IN RECENT PAST -- INCLUDING BHUTTO'S SPECTACULAR VISIT LATE LAST MONTH AND EARLY THIS MONTH (KARACHI 1547 NOTAL) -- HAS HAD VERY CALMING EFFECT ON SITUATION IN PROVINCE OR RAISED ANY HOPES FOR EARLY SETTLEMENT. BALUCHISTAN, AS WE OBSERVED IT FROM QUETTA THIS WEEK, HAS A GREAT MANY ELEMENTS OF A SITUATION GOING OUT OF CONTROL -- GROWING INCIDENCE OF LAWLESSNESS AND DISORDER, A GOVERNMENT UNABLE (OR UNWILLING?) TO APPREHEND AND PUNISH CULPRITS, WIDESPREAD PERCEPTION OF CORRUPTION THAT MAKES MOCKERY OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS, INSUFFICIENT SECURITY FOR ORDINARY TRAVELERS IN MANY RURAL AREAS, SEEMINGLY INSOLUBLE POLITICAL IMPASSE IN THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, ETC. A REAL RESOLUTION OF THIS IMPASSE WOULD DEPEND UPON THE WILLINGNESS OF BHUTTO AND THE NAP LEADERS (AND POSSIBLY BUGTI) TO COMPROMISE THEIR DIFFERENCES -- OF WHICH WE SEE PRECIOUS LITTLE EVIDENCE.

10. BECAUSE OF NATURE OF TERRAIN, POOR COMMUNICATIONS, AND PRIMITIVE SOCIO/POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF AREA, THERE IS STILL NO SIGN THAT SITUATION GIVING RISE TO MAJOR INDIGENOUS OR FOREIGN-SPONSORED ORGANIZED INSURGENCY WITH ADVERSE IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL INTEGRITY OR SECURITY OF PAKISTANI REGIME. UNSATISFACTORY AS THE SITUATION IS IN BALUCHISTAN IT COULD PROBABLY ROCK ALONG FOR SOME CONSIDERABLE TIME WITHOUT ANY FORCEFUL OR DRAMATIC "SOLUTION".
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